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MEMORANDUM TO THE FILES

SUBJECT: Jewish Defense League: Appearance of Meir Kahane

(Distribution: See last page)

Introduction and Summary

Mr. Mainland and Mr. Steiner attended the talk of Jewish Defense League (JDL) National Chairman, Rabbi Meir Kahane, at Agudas Achim Synagogue in Alexandria on February 28. An effective demagogue, Kahane appeared to sway about 50% of the largely middle class audience at all times and perhaps as much as 20% when he advocated violence. He had the large sprinkling of youth in attendance eating out of his hand. Effectively playing upon memories of the Nazi holocaust and propagating the view that a new holocaust might be around the corner, Kahane created a situation where anyone who challenged him would leave himself open to cries of not caring about the fate of his brethren or of being an apologist for the "Jewish establishment." Kahane also called for a mass demonstration at the White House on March 21 in order to make the question of Soviet Jewry "Nixon's problem." Most questions from the capacity audience of about 500 persons were therefore either favorable to Kahane, or neutral.

The "Jewish Establishment"

Kahane reserved his strongest attacks for the leadership of the major Jewish organizations in the U.S. He began what is probably his stock speech by discussing the S. S. St. Louis, which departed Hamburg in 1939 with 930 Jews aboard, whom Kahane described as among the last Jews able to flee from Hitler. He placed the principal blame for the enforced wanderings of these and other Jewish refugees on the then Jewish leadership in the U.S., Britain, and other countries. He stated that American Jewish leaders went hat in hand to President Roosevelt, who, Kahane claimed, advised them "to keep a low profile and not make it a Jewish war." Kahane charged that because of "a Jewish penchant for respectability" and susceptibility to the warnings of Roosevelt and others that strong protests here for German Jewry could arouse anti-Semitism in the U.S., these Jewish leaders did little or nothing to help their co-religionists.

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Kahane similarly castigated the organizers of the recent World Conference of Jewish Communities on Soviet Jewry held in Brussels on February 23-25. He attacked them for spending "millions of dollars" merely to pass a resolution calling upon governments and world opinion to try to persuade the Soviet Government to permit those Soviet Jewish citizens who wish to do so to emigrate and to grant cultural freedom to those who remain. Kahane claimed that Anti-Defamation League President William Wexler called Israeli politician Menachem Begin "a Fascist and a liar." According to Kahane, this demonstrated the hypocrisy of the "respectable" Jewish organizations. Kahane also strongly condemned the Brussels meeting for permitting no debate on methods, and he blamed its organizers for his expulsion from Belgium.

Kahane charged that no Jewish group went into the streets for a Jewish cause until a Jewish student group picketed a block from the Soviet UN Mission in 1964, bringing, according to Kahane, the condemnation of the "Jewish establishment." He claimed that it took the advent of the JDL to put the question of Soviet Jewry "on page one" and turn it into an international issue.

The State of Soviet Jewry

Kahane stated that time is running out for Soviet Jewry. He said Soviet Jews faced "probable physical genocide" in the Doctors' Plot of 1952-53 and were saved only by the death of Stalin. Kahane stated that the successor regimes also would have moved to eliminate the Jewish population if they had been sufficiently strong. He charged that the USG and other Western governments have lost a golden opportunity to aid Soviet Jews since the death of Stalin by not taking advantage of their leverage over "weak Soviet regimes which needed Western sympathy and aid." Kahane claimed that a tremendous struggle is being waged between hawks and doves in the Soviet Politburo, and he warned that if the hawks win, Soviet Jews could face extermination. Kahane stated that if the Soviets suddenly opened the gates and permitted every Jew who wished to do so to emigrate, approximately two million Soviet Jews would choose to remain behind. He added that this "would be our fault -- for allowing them to be forcibly integrated."

Use of Violence

Referring to charges that the tactics of the JDL are "un-Jewish," Kahane stated that this attitude comes from insecure Jews who worship a cult of respectability and fear arousing anti-Semitism. Kahane called for greater Jewish self-respect and he advised his audience not to worry about alienating non-Jews. He bitterly mocked the "Jewish establishment" for its regular "pilgrimages" to the White House, whence they come away "gratified that they were received cordially." Kahane stated that violence "is bad, but sometimes necessary." How much violence? "As much as necessary," stated Kahane. He emphasized that there would be no State of Israel if it were not for the Stern Gang, Irgun, and Haganah. He noted that Moses "smote the Egyptian," and stated that one should strike his enemy before his enemy strikes him. Kahane added that perhaps the JDL's "greatest fruits" would be what it has done for Jewish youth in this country in giving them a Jewish cause: the "national liberation struggle" of Soviet Jewry.

Kahane listed the JDL's ten-point program, which he had been prevented from presenting at Brussels.

- (1) Immediate cessation of all Western talks with the USSR, including those on disarmament and space exploration;
- (2) Ending all trade with the USSR and boycotting of all firms which continue such trade;
- (3) Ending all tourism to the USSR, except selective tourism for the purpose of helping Soviet Jews;
- (4) Ending all exchanges with the USSR;
- (5) Banning the USSR from the Olympics and from international organizations;
- (6) "Legal harassment" of Soviet officials in the U.S., including telephone harassment;
- (7) "Political wooing" of anti-Soviet politicians while opposing those who wish to deal with the USSR;
- (8) "Non-violent civil disobedience," particularly at the White House;

(9) Compulsory courses on Soviet Jewry in Jewish schools;

(10) "Non-stop demonstrations" at all Soviet installations.

Receiving substantial applause on most of these points, Kahane stated at the end that if the Brussels Conference had debated and adopted them, "Soviet Jewry would be on the way to liberation." He described his program as a "moderate" one which all Jews should and could subscribe.

JDL Membership

Kahane stated that the JDL has chapters on 45 college campuses and in 17 cities, including Canada. He stated that one purpose of his Brussels visit was to organize European chapters, and he had intended to meet in Brussels with representatives from several Western countries. Kahane gave the organization's dues-paying membership as 12,000, of whom about 5,000 are "youths," and he stated that the proportion of youth in the JDL's membership is rapidly increasing. He also claimed that the JDL has many more sympathizers who did not wish to join the organization, but help by sending money.

Kahane stated that the JDL has a nucleus of "over 200" members in the Washington area, and he promised to send national organizers here within the next few weeks. When two young members of the audience stated that they have organized their own "Jewish Defense League" in Washington, Kahane replied that this is not permitted without the sanction of national headquarters but he expressed his desire to meet with (and co-opt) this group. These youths described their local group as a "Jewish School for Self-Defense," in existence less than six months, which gives almost daily classes in the art of self-defense in the Washington and Silver Spring areas. They also complained to Kahane that their "School" has been harassed by local Jewish organizations.

Questions and Answers

Most of the questions from the audience were either friendly to Kahane or were phrased in such a manner that he could turn them to his own benefit. One gentleman asked: "Do you agree with the newspaper reports which state that you might be harming the cause of Soviet Jewry?" This gave Kahane an opportunity to reiterate that "if he did not think what he was doing helped, he would not do it." No one asked him to comment on statements

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of recent Jewish immigrants from the Soviet Union who have stated that anti-Soviet violence in this country has harmed their cause.

Another member of the audience asked Kahane's reaction to criticism of the JDL by Soviet rabbis. Kahane replied that there are only seven rabbis remaining in the USSR and that, to his knowledge, only two of them had criticized the JDL. He referred to Rabbi Levin, the Chief Rabbi of Moscow, as a tragic figure who was forced to make statements critical of the JDL. In a turn of phrase typical of his effective demagogery, Kahane stated that Rabbi Levin has also referred to Israel as "a fascist state" -- "and you can be sure that he doesn't believe that anymore than he believes that the JDL hurts Russian Jews."

When a young lady, clearly friendly to the JDL, asked Kahane whether he advocated smuggling Jews out of the USSR and airplane hijackings, he replied that he does. He criticized U.S. Jewish organizations for denying that the recent Leningrad case constituted a hijacking, for "that is just what it was and there is nothing wrong with hijacking." Kahane added in this connection that militant and moderate Jewish groups could complement each other's activities.

Undoubtedly in response to Kahane's intimation that the JDL was responsible for virtually everything which has been accomplished on behalf of persecuted Jews anywhere, another member of the audience asked whether Kahane really wished to take exclusive credit for the commutation of the Leningrad death sentences. Kahane replied that "the whole Jewish protest" achieved the commutation, but he boasted that it was the JDL which galvanized the protest. He claimed that this galvanization took place after the bombing of the Aeroflot office (adding parenthetically "although I don't know who did this") and "after we took over the balcony across from the Soviet UN Mission and began harassing the Russians." This prompted another questioner to point out that there are "both good and bad catalysts," to which Kahane replied that militia activities here are comparable to Israeli retaliation against Arab terrorists, all of which is "essential to the Jewish spirit." Again, the youngsters cheered wildly, and no one rose to challenge Kahane.

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COMMENT

While Kahane was warmly received, many members of the audience abstained from applause. The gentlemen behind us, for example, was overheard to remark rather early in the program: "This guy is a fake!" A knowledgeable challenger probably could have stirred other members of the audience to join in the challenge. On the other hand, he would also have evoked a hostile reaction, particularly but not exclusively from the younger members of the audience, and this is undoubtedly what the skeptics feared.

Although young people swarmed about Kahane at the conclusion of his appearance, few adults took advantage of his sign-up sheets. Less than 40 appeared to have signed. It can be assumed that Kahane won a few new converts too respectable to join formally, but who are prepared to aid in other ways or who are at least more tolerant now toward the JDL. Admission was \$1 for non-Synagogue members. A local Jewish official later opined that Kahane and the JDL had collected at least \$1000 in his two Washington-area appearances on February 28, honoraria included.

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